

What Kind of Ancestor Do You Hope to Be: Responses to Elder Brenda Mason Part 1

AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation

Elder Brenda's beautiful and meaningful piece: *What kind of Ancestor do you hope to be?* was published in the Fall/Winter 2022 issue. The questions asked by Elder Brenda Mason, "What kind of imprints am I leaving?" and "What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me?" are essential for self-reflection and human growth. They encourage us to consider how our words, actions, and behaviours impact others and how we can positively influence the people and the World around us.

We are so inspired by the responses received to Elder Brenda's questions and as they may encourage many of our readers to respond as well, we will be continuing to accept responses to be included in the Fall/Winter issue. Please see more information at the end of this article. Meegwetch to all of our respondents!

We are grateful to have received this inspiring piece written by Métis Elder June Smart, to add to our conversation, she shares her journey of self-discovery and how it has led her to become an advocate for her community. Through her involvement with the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and her interactions with others, June strives to be the best ancestor she can be, passing on the teachings of her ancestors to future generations. She emphasizes the importance of speaking proudly of their history, traditions, and way of life while also weaving in the richness of their stories and successes. By being a conduit between the past and the future, June believes that together, the community can be stronger.

June Smart Métis Elder's Journey of Reflection and Obligation

It's in the quiet of the day as I sit on my deck and gaze over the rapids in our river, watching the majestic eagles fish for salmon that I take time for deep reflection. It is then I most often find myself thinking on my journey, a journey of discovery. A journey in which I have discovered myself. I have discovered who I am. I continue to walk my path with quiet footsteps so that I can pause, look behind me and see my ancestors following me, guiding me in my journey ahead. I only truly came to know who I was later in life. I saw hints of it through the features of



June Smart MNOWC Region 4
Photo 3 May 22

my mother and my grandparents, the tidbits of stories I overheard and seeing them jig dance. I knew who I was... but didn't know; because I didn't fully know our story. I didn't have a true sense of my roots. I didn't understand the struggles my ancestors suffered through.

With my newfound revelation, I realize that I owe my ancestors a great debt that I must pay. Their spirit is asking me to pay my debt forward to those who follow me and, in so doing, be the best ancestor I can be. This obligation I accept with open arms is the very reason I became involved with the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and serve in a number of capacities. I became involved to make a difference, to influence change, and advocate for those in need. To be the very best ancestor I can be.

I must follow in my mother's footsteps but take a different path. I must speak to our tragic history, but in so doing, weave into those stories the richness of our history, the traditions we hold close to our hearts, the strength we have, the vibrancy of our way of life and the successes we have enjoyed. I must remind our brethren that our voices can never be silenced again, and we can speak proudly of who we are. I must speak with a spirit of joy and optimism for our future and instill confidence in all of



June Smart's Grandparents. Mother 1965

us, and in particular our youth, that our future is full of hope. We will make our own destiny, and they will lead us.

In my daily walk and with every person I meet, I challenge myself to do so with a smile and open arms. I love meeting people and speaking with them. The words I choose must be words of wisdom and understanding spoken with humility and purpose. I need to be open and honest so my motives and integrity are understood to be true, and in so doing, I can garner the trust needed for others to confide in me. In everything I do, it must be to promote our resolve, kindness, understanding, work ethic and integrity. We must hold true to our values and our teachings.

I am so grateful that I have been able to draw on the life skills and experiences of our MNO Elders as a guideline on how to set an example. Their teachings and how they walk in their daily lives has been an inspiration, and I have always taken their sage counsel to heart. Through these Elders, I continue to mature with a renewed sense of respect for all. I am hopeful that I can pass on to others all the teachings my parents, grandparents, Elders, and so many others have instilled in me. I hope that I can fulfill my obligation and be that ancestor who will continue the legacy our ancestors left for us. I hope to pass on this obligation to future generations, challenge them to pick up the gauntlet and lead us into a bright future with pride and determination.

For me to be the best ancestor I can be, I must be a conduit between our past generation and the future generation. It is how we have our sense of belonging. **Together we are stronger!**

Métis Elder June Smart,

MNO Women's Council Region 4 Rep, North Channel Métis Council Women's Rep, MNO Veteran

Sharing Inspiring Stories of Early Childhood Educators

The responses include reflections from four early childhood educators on the teachings of Elder Brenda Mason. Hedi Gordon, a manager of family programming, encourages

exploring one's Indigenous culture to positively impact children and families; Lori Huston, a Ph.D. student, stresses leaving imprints of kindness, humility, love, and honesty and shares her heritage; Kahenttiosta Yen, RECE immerses herself in the traditions of her ancestors and shares this knowledge with younger generations; The fourth respondent, Rocio Gujani, a Ph.D. student, shares her story of growing up in the Andean mountains and impacting her worldview and pedagogical practice.

Reflections on Elder Brenda's Teachings: Embracing Indigenous Roots and Connecting with Children and Families

Thank you, Elder Brenda, for taking the time to share your story. Your thoughtful questions have caused me to pause and think deeply about my ancestry and my family intertwined with my impact on children and families. I hope to have impacted the children I have had the opportunity to connect with in ways that have encouraged and strengthened their Indigenous connection. I hope that I have ongoing opportunities to engage with children, parents and communities to encourage them to ask more questions about our history and to ensure that all Indigenous children (status and non-status, on-reserve and off-reserve, First Nation, Inuit and Métis) know that they are valued, and loved and have vital history to learn and to continue to share. I recently heard someone speak of the shame that has impacted the Indigenous People, which profoundly impacted me. It connected with me on a personal level. My father and his siblings felt so much shame that they ran from their communities and their connected roots and lost language and culture, causing my struggle to search for connection. I hope never again does any Indigenous family bear that shame. I hope that we all feel that connection, especially the children and families we work with, and that they are encouraged to share their stories, language and culture. Moving forward, I will develop my understanding of connectedness and how that impacts my Indigenous Roots. I will continue to challenge myself to explore my family's Indigenous culture and share what I have learnt with my family and my community. This alignment of continuous interaction with one's emotional, mental, spiritual realities and connection to the natural world is found within the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. I will continue Elder Brenda's Challenge with a challenge to look up what a medicine wheel represents. How can you impact the children in your care by acknowledging this framework? What are your next steps in an inspiring connection?

Hedi Gordon

Madadjiwan, Algonquin First Nation (Non-Status)
Manager of Family Programming

Embracing Indigenous Heart Teachings for Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Education

Elder Brenda's words have deeply touched and inspired me. Her reflection on her Anishinaabe name and the significance of the word "imprint" reminded me of the importance of positively impacting the children and families in our lives and beyond. Elder Brenda has expressed that we can leave imprints of kindness, humility, love, and honesty.

Boozhoo, Taanishi, my name is Lori Huston (she/her) Métis, Scottish and British heritage. My Métis and Scottish heritage are on my father's side, connected to the Red River Métis people. My British heritage is on my mom's side; my grandmother, a British settler, came to Canada as a war bride in the 1940s. I was born and raised in Treaty 3 territory, Red Lake., a small northwestern Ontario town that served as a Hudson's Bay Company fur-trading post in the late 1800s. I am a mother of two sons and an Early Childhood Educator for over 25 years. Currently a doctoral student in the Education, Curriculum and Pedagogy program at the University of British Columbia. My Ph.D. work intends to merge Indigenous knowledge frameworks with heart pedagogies and determine how these can support teaching and learning in early learning settings.

I believe I have a unique opportunity to be an ancestor who embraces diversity and celebrates the diverse Indigenous identity of the children, families, and fellow educators with whom I have and continue to co-learn. Heartwork connects me to my ancestors, passion, empathy, and authenticity. I am committed to nurturing inclusion and respect for all to help create a more accepting and understanding society. Within the focus of my Ph.D. research project, I tend to highlight Indigenous heart teachings that emphasize the importance of holistic development, recognizing that mind, body, heart and spirit are interconnected and essential for overall well-being. These teachings also highlight the importance of community, relationships, and connection to the land in supporting children's wellness. Applying an Indigenous heart teachings lens to me also includes acknowledging Indigenous children and families diverse cultural contexts and experiences. It means recognizing the importance of language and culture in nurturing childhoods and the impact of historical trauma and ongoing colonialism on Indigenous communities.

Additionally, as someone with both Métis and English heritage, I believe I have the potential to bridge cultures and promote understanding and reconciliation. By embracing my identity being a guide to the heart of the stories ensuring all voices are heard to create a path of acceptance

and knowledge, I desire to build a better tomorrow for the upcoming generations. As an educator, I have an ethical responsibility to model values and teachings. I will continue to encourage children and families to be brave, take risks, and embrace their true selves.

I am grateful for Elder Brenda's wisdom, reflection, and guidance as my Elder mentor over the last 15 years. Elder Brenda's wisdom reminded me of the importance of leaving love imprints in future generations.

Meegwetch, Maarsii,

Lori Huston, RECE, Ph.D. Student

Reflections on Leaving a Legacy for Future Generations.

As an Indigenous woman, I reflect on the question of what I am doing to leave for others following behind me. As an adult, I am always striving to make choices that will leave a legacy, continuing to supply guidance and insight to other generations and live a life that will make others proud. I want to immerse myself in my own traditions from generations before me, using the knowledge to provide the following generations with insight and understanding of how to live a life that truly encompasses the learning, knowledge, and spirit of being Indigenous and living in a world with so many choices of walking between two worlds. While gathering with others, I reflect on my own firsthand experiences, the joy of being around others, learning from so many, and collaborating with others ideas to form new thoughts and ideas to continue down a path of learning, teachings, and guiding.

Kahentiiosta Yen, RECE

Weaving in Ends on Footprints and Imprints: A Reflection - Response to the Call of Wisdom

The truth about stories is that that's all we are. 'There are stories that take seven days to tell ... 'There are other stories that take you all your life' (King 2003, p.122).

My personal story will be shared to enrich and to contextualize this reflection. Such murmur accentuates the prefacing of this telling. My narrative is grounded by the wisdom of Elder Brenda Mason's invitational inquiry: What kind of imprints am I leaving? What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming

behind me? What imprints am I leaving when I have been with people in a gathering? I come from the mountains. I am a wayfarer (Ingold, 2009), one who travels by foot, traversing both metaphorically and literally through life. One of my many voyages led me to Turtle Island and so I became a settler of Ottawa, a city that was built on the unceded, unsundered Territory of the Algonquin Anishinabek People. As an uninvited guest of this local earth, I hold significant responsibility. Guided by the teachings instilled in me by my parents and the Andes mountains since childhood, I strive to leave behind the teachings of these footprints and imprints on this local earth, across the Island, and as I walk all walks of life.

I grew up surrounded by the majestic Andean mountains. There mist, rain, rainbows, and all shades of green are present year-round. Fresh wild foliage and fresh produce was harvested and food was cooked with love. I am deeply indebted to the Andes because this is the place where I came to be and gave birth to my ancestors — these mountains are home to me! From this affirmation and with utmost gratitude for the Andes Mountains, I position myself as mestiza. I am Colombian of mestiza (mixed Indigenous, African, and European- Colombian) ancestry. I was born, raised, and spent my early childhood years immersed playing at the ancestral hills, valleys, and slopes of the Muisca People where the city of Bogotá, Distrito Capital, D.C., of Colombia was built by European settlers.

My parents instilled in me love and reverence for the Andes and taught me the facts of life through stories about the mystery of these mountains' altitudes and latitudes. My parents instilled in me love and respect for the creatures that inhabited these plateaus, as well as an appreciation for the beauty of the universe. They often took me on walks during clear-sky nights to learn with the stars, the moon phases, and the dance of the fireflies. Their teachings on the value of simplicity, reverence, mindfulness, and gratitude have helped shape my worldview and remain with me to this day. They taught me to stand up for my rights, to ask questions, to reflect upon mistakes, to dedicate time to play, to work, to be thankful, to appreciate, and to cherish. Ultimately, my parents emphasized the importance of appreciating, caring, and learning with the more-than-human worlds.

My parents' teachings accentuated the interconnectedness of the world, as we share the same air, water, sky, and earth: "We are flesh of its flesh" (Abram, 2011, p.63). Growing up with these teachings and my childhood experiences (see Table 1), I learnt to appreciate and care for our only home — the earth! These teachings have left imprints and footprints that have guided me throughout my life's journeys, nurturing my soul and inspiring me during both

my transcontinental and local wayfarer journeys. These are the echoes of the Andes' winds whispering in my ear: "I and the world are one". The constant murmur of the Andes reminds me that "to be one is always to become with many" (Haraway, 2008, p.4).



The teachings from the Andes and my parents have had a profound impact on my pedagogical practice, my academic, personal, and professional journeys. As I walked on these journeys, my footprints have created a trail of paths that I have shared alongside with others, e.g. the more-than-human worlds and the imperfect humans. Van Doren and Bird Rose (2016) urge us to tell stories "That cultivate the capacity for response" (p.89 italics original). My reflection is a response to Elder Brenda Mason's wisdom. Responding is a give-away rhythmic event- journey of exchange: that is receiving-from and giving back-to in response because "this time you give and next time you receive" (Kimmerer, p.381). With humility, it is my sincere hope that my sharing inspires readers to examine their life experiences and think about how their footprints and imprints have manifested to them their pedagogies. Then, they can share with others how these are manifested in their daily practice. Happy sharing! Rocio.

Rocio R. Gujani, RECE, Ph. D. Student

Resources: What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?

1. Housdoerffer, J., Parry Hecht, M., Nelson, K.M., & Kassouf Cummings, K. (Eds.). (2021). *What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
2. *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations / Volumes: 1, 2, 3, 4* Van Horn, G., Kimmerer, R. W., & Hausdoerffer, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*. Libertyville, IL: Center for Humans and Nature Press.
3. *Children's Book: Prince, L. Prince, G., & Joseph, C. (Illustrator). (2022). Be a Good Ancestor*. Lexile, NP: Orca Book Publishers.
4. Website: Center for Humans and Nature <http://humansand-nature.org>

My Childhood Experiences from the Andes

Early Memories They...	Felt	Sounded	Tasted	Looked	Smelled
Mist	Mystery	Soft	Sweet	Light reflections	Earthy
Rain	Happiness	Endless patterns of echoes drippings	Sweet	Transparent	Earthy spring garden
Rainbows	Excitement	Eternal silence	No taste	Bright pastel stripes	Wet soil
Green	Dawn to the earth	Silence	Spring water	Even path	Moist and soil
Bonfire	Reverence	Crunchy	No taste	Red, blue, transparent	Smoke
Parents	Love	Story telling	So sweet!	Like an oak tree	Bonfire, earth
Flowers	Soft and velvety	Silence	Sour, salty, hot	Colourful	Sweet
Trees	Rough, soft,	Hear beat	Sweet sap	Powerful, strong	Wet soil
Food	Thankful	Crunchy	So, so good!	Colourful	Herbs
Siblings	Happiness	Laughing, singing, screaming	Love	Faces full of dirt	Bonfire
Wild Places	Mystery	Echoes	Sweet	Eternal beauty	Home

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The AECEO Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee, including Elder Brenda Mason, is grateful for the responses that we have received. As the committee came together to discuss the responses and how we would publish them, we felt that extending the call for responses to the Fall/Winter 2023 eceLink was important. We were moved when we read Métis Elder June Smart's response, and we humbly ask our readers to help us connect with an Inuk Elder as we would like to include the perspectives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Elders. If you considered writing a response for this issue but did not have time or were unsure, please know that we will accept responses until October 2023, and you can reach out to the guiding committee for support and mentorship and that anyone can submit a response to Elder Brenda's questions: What kind of ancestor do you hope to be? "What kind of imprints am I leaving?" and "What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me?" Through these collective efforts, the committee aims to foster a diverse and inclusive dialogue that can contribute to meaningful change and reconciliation. To connect with the guiding committee or submit a response, please email info@aeceo.ca.

For more information: https://www.aeceo.ca/ecelink_articles